4-19-1989

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Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, April 19, 1989

On April 14, Secretary of State James Baker told the American Society of Newspaper Editors that he refused to permit Cuban President Fidel Castro and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to speak in Washington because such trips would be an unwarranted departure from Bush administration policy of trying to isolate them. The Society had been informed that "under no circumstances" would Castro or Ortega be granted a visa to address the annual editors' convention held in Washington. Baker denied a suggestion by Chicago Tribune editor James D. Squires that the visa prohibition on the two presidents was equivalent to "the use of censorship as a policy tool." Baker continued by stating that the US does not have diplomatic relations with Cuba and Nicaragua and that it would be harmful to US diplomatic efforts for these countries to be brought "into the community of nations" under existing circumstances. The US continues to have diplomatic relations with Nicaragua. Relations were downgraded by the Reagan administration and a travel ban to the US was placed on Nicaraguan officials last October. US relations with Cuba were broken off in 1961 and have been handled in recent years by "interest sections" in the two capitals that serve most of the functions of embassies. Squires told reporters that the ASNE program committee had attempted to arrange a 30th anniversary appearance by Castro, who had spoken to the editors' convention in Washington in 1959 shortly after taking power in Cuba. Squires said the idea of an appearance by Ortega was generated by the Nicaraguan government in repeated telephone calls to ASNE. Shortly after President Bush took office, Squires said, the program committee met with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Michael G. Kozak, who said visas would be denied Castro and Ortega. After hearing Baker's explanation of the visa denials, Squires said, "Yes, it is censorship" to bar the appearances of Castro and Ortega. Speaking at a Society luncheon several hours after Baker, Vice President Dan Quayle appealed to the US press to shine the spotlight of "media attention" on Ortega and his government's actions. When asked to justify his statement in light of the visa denial, Quayle responded, "You're not going to learn very much from him coming up here and responding to your questions and making promises." Later, an aide to Quayle told the Washington Post that he had not been familiar with "the details" of the visa denials. After Baker's comments, State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler cited a presidential proclamation and US policy as grounds "to deny visas to senior officials of the Cuban government, given ongoing Cuban support for external subversion and internal repression." She said she did not know why Ortega would not be eligible for a US visa. (Basic data from Washington Post, 04/15/89; AP, 04/14/89)

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